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ABSTRACT

In 1988 the Education Reform Act was passed in England. Among its clauses, the one that laid the framework for a centralized, national curriculum represented the most significant change. One of the key aspects of the national curriculum concerned the way in which student achievement and progress were to be measured. Attainment was to be assessed against "attainment targets"; each attainment target would have 10 "statements of attainment" against which the pupil's level of performance could be measured. This paper argues that the new History National Curriculum is based upon a flawed notion of children's historical thinking. The History National Curriculum is based upon the notion that children's historical thinking develops uniformly and progressively through each of the attainment targets and that for each attainment target the nature of this progression can be detailed in a hierarchy of 10 statements. An examination of the statements of attainment is made, and a review of research on children's historical thinking and research on the experience of history teachers in the classroom is carried out. It is argued that frameworks such as those adopted in the History National Curriculum impose a rigidity that limits the possibility for developing the complexity of real historical understanding in students. A list of 61 references is included. (DB)

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Students' Historical Thinking and the History National Curriculum in England

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In 1988, one of the most far reaching pieces of educational legislation was passed by the British Parliament. The Education Reform Act transformed the educational scene in England and Wales (Northern Ireland and Scotland have their own separate systems) by undermining the power of the local county and metropolitan education authorities (the LEAs), giving schools control of their management and budgets and guaranteeing parents greater choice of school as well as feedback on standards. But of all the act's clauses, those which laid down the framework for a centralised, national curriculum represented perhaps the most significant change (Bash and Coulby, 1989). For the first time in the history of education the government would determine the aims, objectives and content of the curriculum, and the assessment, recording and reporting of achievement of all pupils aged between five and sixteen in state schools. The government determined that the compulsory curriculum would consist of ten subjects - three core, mathematics, English and science; and seven foundation which included geography and history (an arbitrary decision for which there was little or no justification (White, 1988)).

The History National Curriculum for England

The History Working Group (which the Secretary of State personally selected to draw up proposals for the History National Curriculum for England [1]) took nearly a year and a half to produce its final report. The format of this was heavily circumscribed by a centrally imposed framework. Subject content was to be laid down within 'Programmes of Study' for each of the four 'key stages'. Key stage 1 would cover the five to seven age group; key stage 2, the seven to eleven age group; key stage 3, the eleven to fourteen age group; key stage 4, the fourteen to sixteen age group. To this, the Secretary of State added his own prescriptions for the history curriculum. First, he made it clear that a substantial proportion of the content of the curriculum should be focussed on British history. 'The

programmes of study should have at the core the history of Britain, the record of its past and, in particular its political, constitutional and cultural heritage' (DES, 1990, p. 189). The programmes should 'also take account of Britain's evolution and its changing role as a European, Commonwealth and world power influenced and being influenced by ideas, movements and events elsewhere in the world' (ibid p. 189); they were also to include a study of classical civilizations. Overall, 'they should help pupils to acquire and develop an historical approach based on objective analysis of evidence.....' (ibid, p. 189). The history curriculum should also afford possibilities for cross curricular work - for example, the discussion of equal opportunites and multi-cultural issues, environmental education, industrial and economic awareness, citizenship and the skills of communication, problem solving, and study and thinking skills (ibid, p183). The Working Group itself based its content selection on Bruner's conception of the spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960, pp. 52 - 54). Concepts, themes, topics and skills would be readdressed by older pupils at a deeper level (DES, pp. 5 - 6).

More prescriptive, however, were the ways in which achievement and progress in each subject were to be measured. Attainment was to be assessed against 'attainment targets'; each attainment target would have ten hierarchical 'statements of attainment' against which the pupil's level of attainment could be measured. The attainment targets and their associated statements of attainment were to be seen as 'the backbone of the National Curriculum' (DES op. cit., p. 7), the creators of standards and the promoters of progress. Assessment, recording and reporting on the level reached would be in terms of the attainment targets and the statements of attainment. Reporting to parents would be done annually; it would be conducted on a public, nation-wide basis at the end of each key stage. Schools would have to publish results so that comparisons could be made.

The government-appointed Task Group on Assessment and Testing which established this framework envisaged that progress through the levels in all ten subjects would be linear and that the average pupil would be achieving level 2 at the end of key stage 1 (aged seven), level 4 at the end of key stage 2 (aged eleven), level 6 at the end of key stage 3 (aged

fourteen) and level 7 at the end of key stage 4 (aged sixteen) (TGAT report, 1988, para. 104).

Two major conceptions, therefore, about the nature and development of children's historical thinking underpin the report of the history working group and the National History Curriculum which is based on it. The first is one which commonsense alone confirms - though research gives support to the belief; that is, that children's understanding of concepts and skills can be deepened by revisiting the same themes, the same topics, the same skills areas (Booth, 1979; Shemilt, 1980). The second is more complex - and certainly more contentious. It is the notion that children's historical thinking develops uniformly and progressively through each of the attainment targets and that for each attainment target the nature of this progression can be detailed in a hierarchy of ten statements. It is this conception of children's historical thinking that I want to explore in this paper.

A Criticism of the History National Curriculum

Let me begin by critically examining the History National Curriculum attainment targets (ATs) and their associated statements of attainment (SoAs) (DES, 1991, pp. 3 - 10). There are three ATs. The first is entitled 'Knowledge and Understanding of History' and focuses on 'the development of the ability to describe and explain historical change and cause, and analyse different features of historical situations' (ibid., p. 3). This is clearly an objective which is dealing mainly with the products of historical study; and the statements of attainment range from simple story telling (level 1 (age 5 - 6): 'place in sequence events in a story about the past'), through to a more complex understanding of change (level 5 (age 12 - 13): 'distinguish between different types of change'), to a level 10 response (age 16) where the pupil can 'show an understanding of the issues involved in describing, analysing and explaining complex historical issues' (ibid p. 7).

AT2 is concerned with 'the development of the ability to understand interpretations in history' (ibid., pp 7 - 8). Thus at level 1 pupils

should be able to 'understand that stories may be about real people or fictional people'; at level 5, 'recognise that interpretations of the past, including popular accounts, may differ from what is known to have happened; at level 10, 'show an understanding of the issues involved in trying to make history as objective as possible'.

AT3 is entitled 'The Use of Historical Sources' - how far the pupil can 'acquire evidence from historical sources, and form judgements about their reliability and evidence' (ibid., pp 9 - 10). At level 1, pupils should be able to 'communicate information acquired from an historical source'; at level 5, 'comment on the usefulness of an historical source by reference to its content, as evidence for a particular enquiry'; and at level 10, 'explain the problematic nature of historical evidence, showing an awareness that judgements based on historical sources may well be provisional'.

What was the rationale for choosing the attainment targets and their associated statements of attainment? The former are clearly a reflection of the concern that history educators have had for at least twenty years for teaching the structure of the subject, not merely its content. The 'New History' movement, as it was called in the 1970s (Jones, 1973), was born of the dissatisfaction that was increasingly being voiced about the state of history in English schools (see for example Price, 1968; Booth, 1969); it was given direction by Bruner's seminal book *The Process of Education* (1960) which stressed the importance of determining the 'most fundamental understanding that can be achieved of the underlying principles that give structure to [the] subject' (p. 31) and by Bloom's taxonomy of eductional objectives (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 1964) which was adopted by history educators with the publication in 1971 of Coltham and Fines' *Educational Objectives for the Study of History. A Suggested Framework* (1971); it achieved national recognition when the government-funded curriculum and assessment body, the Schools Council (now repleaced by the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council), launched a history curriculum development project in 1972. The Schools Council History 13 - 16 Project took as its watch words the nature of history and the needs of the child. The first unit of teaching

materials that it published was entitled 'What is history?'; all its subsequent work was based on a view that emphasised active pupil involvement with a range of source materials, the importance of key historical concepts such as change, continuity and causation and the need for fieldwork and for the pupil to encounter the varieties of way in which the past can be studied (Schools Council, 1976).

The Schools History 13 - 16 Project (SHP), as it is now known, has had immense influence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Something like thirty per cent. of all secondary schools who enter pupils for national history examinations at the age of sixteen plus, now follow the course in years 10 and 11 and their pupils take the public examination at the age of sixteen (the General Certificate of Secondary Education) which assesses their achievement. But there is hardly a school in the country that has not been influenced by the project's approach to history teaching and its philosophy. Active learning, with role play and the use of source materials, became commonplace in many schools. Indeed, there were those who argued that child centred learning in history had gone too far and that content and coverage were being abandoned in favour of a skills-based approach (see for example the newsletters of a national organisation called the Campaign for Real Education, 18 Westlands Grove, Stockton Lane, York YO3 OEF - especially the letter of 13.7.91). It was therefore with some relief that history educators greeted the enactment of the History NationalCurriculum in March 1991. Up front, ahead of the programmes of study, were the three attainment targets firmly embracing the concepts and skills which are at the heart of historical understanding. History, true to its Western tradition, was presented as a debatable, even post-modernist, subject (Jenkins, 1991); understanding the past was dependent on using a wide range of sources as evidence and acknowledging that the 'past is a foreign country' (Hartley, 1953, quoted Lowenthal, 1985) which we can never revisit, only glimpse from a variety of perspectives.

Difficulties in using the History National Curriculum Statements of Attainment

It can then be argued that the attainment targets do spell out crucial dimensions of the structure of historical understanding; the problems arise when the History National Curriculum model is used for assessing the development of children's historical thinking. The Chairman of the History Working Group made no bones about the fact that the committee was unhappy at having to work within the TGAT model of progression and assessment; there was no body of research the Group could draw on, no evidence that an *a priori* map of children's historical thinking could be devised in this way. In the end the Group had to rely on hunch and intuition in drawing up the hierarchy of statements of attainment at ten levels for each attainment target; and the fact that civil servants subsequently modified these statements is evidence enough of their arbitrary nature (DES, 1990; DES, 1991a, 1991b). Their defects as a framework for charting the nature and development of children's thinking in history are manifold.

In the first place, it is hard to see each attainment target and its associated statements of attainment, as a discrete cognitive skill or concept. The demonstration of attainment at any level in attainment target 1 (knowledge and understanding of history) must inevitably involve the use of historical sources (attainment target 3); how else could a pupil show the level of understanding he or she had achieved? The interdependence of the attainment targets is particularly acute in attainment target 2 (interpretations of history) which demands knowledge, conceptual understandings and the skill of using historical sources. Secondly, even granted that it may be possible to make the *focus* of concern a particular conceptual understanding or a skill, ignoring the other cognitive factors which will be involved, attainment at a given level does not necessarily imply ability to perform at a lower. In other words, many of the statements are self-standing and cannot be part of a hierarchical progression . For example, the ability to 'identify different types of cause and consequence' (level 5b, AT1) does not necessarily mean that the pupil can 'suggest reasons why people in the past acted as they did' (level 2b, AT1); the ability to 'demonstrate how historical interpretations

depend on the selection of sources' (level 6, AT2) does not necessarily mean that the pupil can 'distinguish between a fact and a point of view' (level 3, AT2); the ability to 'compare the usefulness of different historical sources as evidence for a particular enquiry' (level 6, AT3) does not necessarily mean that the pupil can 'make deductions from historical sources '(level 3, AT3) (DES op. cit., pp 3 - 10). The disjunction between the statements is perhaps most acute in AT2, interpetations in history, where the statements seem to be mixing up a number of quite different skills and understandings. The understanding of how histories are constructed, why histories may differ, the uses to which societies put history and the skills of analysing histories demand a variety of cognitive skills and it is difficult if not impossible to see the continuum of a hierarchical progression in this particular attainment target.

Even if one grants that it is possible to see some sort of progression in the statements of the other two ATs, the crux of the matter is this: how far can the SoAs be used to make valid and reliable assessment of a pupil's historical thinking? Here, it seems to me, we are up against the greatest defect in the model of children's historical thinking which the History National Curriculum presents. For the statements are content free; they make no demand that this particular substantive concept be addressed, that this particular document or source be analysed, that these particular questions be asked, that that particular body of knowledge be drawn on. Assessment of an objective, therefore, cannot be determined by a simple statement of intent - 'make deductions from a source'- or whatever; context is all important.

Context here can be described as the four dimensions of any assessment situation (THRG, 1991). The first dimension concerns the objective - what concept or skill the test is aiming to assess. It may be a conceptual understanding of, say, causation; or a cognitive skill such as the comprehension or analysis of a written source. The difficulty level, however, will largely be determined by the second dimension, the historical topic and the materials on which the assessment is to be based. The topic may be a complex theme such as economic policy in Germany in the 1920s; it

may be a more immediately accessible issue such as the Roman villa in Britain. The 'materials' may consist of a simple question; they may be a longer passage; they may be a range of source materials, pictorial, written, statistical. The third dimension is the response that is expected of the pupil. Is he or she to answer in continuous prose? Orally? Is the response to be some more substantial project - a slide/tape sequence; a drama presentation; a video recording; a written dissertation? Or does the test consist of multiple choice questions? Then there is the dimension of the nature of the knowledge and skills the pupil is expected to bring to the test. For example, if a question focusing on the pupil's understanding of the reasons for the United States' entry into the First World War gives the principle 'facts' to be included, the task may well be made simpler for the pupil than if this information had been omitted.

Without these four dimensions, the statements of attainment are of little value in providing a hierarchical framework for assessing the nature and level of children's historical thinking. Two practical examples will make this clear. When I was teaching seventeen-year-old students American history, we would spend time in the early part of the course studying the text of the American constitution. I would consider that my students were doing well if they could communicate their understanding of some of the principal ideas and information that this complex and difficult document contains. Yet in National Curriculum terms this would place them at level one of AT3 - can 'communicate information acquired from an historical source', a level which, according to the History National Curriculum, a five or six-year-old should be achieving. On the other hand, I would take a class of nine or ten-year-olds to the local folk museum which exhibits (amongst other things) furniture, toys and household objects used in Cambridgeshire homes in the 19th. century. Our visit could focus on cooking in Victorian times. Which objects can tell us about the way the kitchen was run? Which objects are similar to the ones we use in the kitchen today? Which objects are different? What does this difference tell you about catering in the 19th. century? Here the pupils would be operating at level 6 of AT3 - can 'compare the usefulness of different historical sources as evidence for a particular enquiry' - a level they

should not be reaching, according to the National Curriculum, until the age of thirteen or fourteen.

It can, of course, be argued that the development of national tests for the end of each key stage will standardise the context for assessment and show teachers the sort of questions, materials and knowledge expectations that are appropriate to pupils of different ages; but the exemplars the test development agencies will provide (so far none has been publicised, though the contract for developing key stage 1 assessment has been awarded to the National Foundation for Educational Research) may well not be very helpful in enabling teachers to transfer the format to other periods or topics. Nor will this do anything to mitigate the feeling which this model of the development of thinking inevitably generates that the lower the level, the lower the skill or concept; that ages and levels are inextricably linked and that we should not be attempting, say, a level 6 response with pupils in key stage 2 (seven to eleven-year-olds).

Piagetian-based Research into Children's Historical Thinking

Here then we are in danger of returning to a view of historical thinking which the research of Hallam in particular created (Hallam, 1966, 1975). Hallam was one of a number of researchers who used the Piagetian framework of cognition to investigate the nature of children's historical thinking (Bassett, 1940; Loughran, 1957; Lodwick, 1958; Case and Collinson, 1962; Stones, 1965, 1967; Bell, 1965; Hughes, 1965; Davies, 1965; McNally, 1970; Stokes, 1970; Rees, 1976). His work was influential because it was widely reported and commented on (for example, Hallam, 1967, 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1971; Dickinson and Lee, 1978; Thompson, 1972; Steele, 1976; Maitland, 1977; Garvey and Krug, 1977).

Piaget postulates a holistic view of the development of children's thinking; that is, that the adaptation and development of thinking from infancy to adulthood can only be understood in terms of the total system. The system consists of an invariant hierarchy of discrete stages which the child passes through, with the successful negotiation of one stage being the prerequisite for the development of the next. The earliest stage is

the sensory motor period, from birth to about the age of two. From the age of two to about seven is the period of pre-operational representation where the child is trying to get to grips with the world of symbols. Thought will be expressed through language but the thinking exhibited is egocentric and often illogical. It is only in the stage of concrete operations (ages 7 to 11 or 12) that the child begins to show evidence of logical and deductive thinking on the basis of the immediately available evidence. In the fourth and final stage, formal operations, the child moves into the realm of pure thought. Piaget elaborated the structure of formal operational thought and arrived at a concept of a complex 'mental scaffolding held up by a number of girders.....so that the agile subject can move vertically and horizontally from one point to another without reaching impasse' (Inhelder and Piaget, 1958, p xx).

Hallam's first piece of research indicated that the stage of formal operations which Piaget shows appearing from about the age of eleven begins in history at the mental age of 16.5 (Hallam, op.cit.); his subsequent research showed that though lively and challenging teaching could accelerate the thinking processes of some of the nine and ten-year-old pupils in his research sample, the pupils aged thirteen to fourteen remained remarkably unaffected and showed no significant improvement. The pupils remained firmly entrapped in the stage of concrete operations.

Such conclusions are depressing for history teachers as they suggest that Bruner's contention 'that any subject can be taught in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development' (Bruner, op. cit., p.33) is false as far as the teaching and learning of history are concerned. If the majority of children during the years of compulsory years of schooling can only reach a level of thinking which is the 'means for structuring present reality' (Bruner, op.cit., p.37), what hope is there of them understanding the past which can never be revisited, and which is for ever a foreign country?

There is, I believe, good reason to reject this view and indeed to resist strongly any model of the development of children's thinking which is tightly allied to ages and stages because of the danger of being limited in

our expectations of what children can do. This danger becomes all the more acute when the curriculum is assessment driven as it is in the case of History National Curriculum. We pitch our teaching at the level we have been given instead of asking ourselves: what is the nature of the understanding I wish my pupils to gain from this particular historical topic and how can I translate that idea into the hard currency of classroom practice?

The Nature of Historical Thinking

Piaget's theories of cognition themselves have come under attack both for their overlogical, over rational definition of thinking and for the methodology on which they are based (the literature is extensive but see for example, Flavell, 1963; Watts, 1972; Smedslund, 1977; Brown and Desforges, 1977; Driver, 1978; Siegel and Brainerd, 1978). But his developmental model is, I would argue, particularly inappropriate for measuring *historical* thinking. Piaget elaborated his framework on the basis of experiments in the natural sciences where the demand was for natural entailments and the logic of inductive and deductive thinking. I have argued elsewhere (Booth 1979, pp 6 - 40) that the logic of historical thought is not primarily deductive or inductive. The historian is not moving from a general proposition or 'covering-law' to an explanation of an event, as Carl Hempel would have us believe (Hempel, 1942, 1959); nor are most historians concerned with inducing an overarching theory to unlock the mystery of the past. For the object of the historian's study - the human past - is incommeasurably different from the object of investigation of the natural scientist; and the thinking which it engenders is equally different, as Fischer reminds us:

> 'The logic of historical thought is not a formal logic of deductive inference. It is not a symmetrical structure of Aristotelian syllogisms, or Ramean dialects, or Boolean equations. Nor is it precisely an inductive logic, like that of Mills or Keynes or Carnap. In consists neither in inductive reasoning from the particular, nor in deductive reasoning from the general to the particular. Instead, it is a process of *adductive* reasoning in the simple sense of adducing

answers to specific questions, so that a satisfactgory 'fit' is obtained. The answers may be general or particular, as the questions require. History is, in short, a problem solving discipline. A historian is someone (anyone) who asks an open-ended question about past events and answers it with selected facts arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm...' (Fischer, 1971, p. xv)

In a footnote he examines the word 'adductive' further and defines it as a combination between 'abduction, the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis and induction, the experimental testing of a theory' (ibid., p. xvi). The word is satisfactory in that it avoids any sense of logical conclusiveness or inconclusiveness but emphasises the drawing together of related events to a common centre and the construction of that imaginative web which is the hallmark of Collingwood's historical thinking (Collingwood, 1946).

Others, too, present a model of history which is essentially pluralistic and concerned with historical discourse as story telling. Hexter, for example, in a delightful and human example which he calls 'the case of the muddy pants' (Hexter, 1972, p. 66), emphasises the need for the historian to tell a full, warm-blooded and human story. Gallie, too, argues that the first job of the historian is to produce a convincing narrative and that 'explanations, causal generalisations *subserve this*' (Gallie, 1964, p. 111).

Keith Jenkins, in a recent work, (Jenkins, 1991) presents an approach to history which embraces such views of the past within a post-modernist framework. In his short, polemical book he distinguishes sharply between the past - all that has happened in time - and history - those stories or discourses of events on which historians choose to focus; and he argues against the atomistic, skills-based approach that for example the History National Curriculum advances in favour of a methodolgical study of the past.

'..... I have had to argue that the truths of the past elude us; that history is intersubjective and ideologically positioned; that objectivity and being unbiased are chimeras; that empathy is flawed;

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> that 'originals' do not entail anything genuine; that history is, in opposition to being an art or a science, something else - something *sui generis*, a worldly, wordy language game played for real, and where the metaphors of history as science or history as art, reflect the distribution of power that put these metaphors into play.....I have been concerned to argue for....a positive reflexive sceptisim.....Such reflexivity ponders over how the discourse one is studying - history - has been written by forces and pressures way beyond its ostensible object of enquiry - the past - forces and pressures that I think can best be understood today by the practices and ideas of post-modernism' (Jenkins, op. cit., p.56, p.57).

Such arguments emphasise the holistic nature of historical thinking rather than its component parts and stress the uniqueness of historical thought; above all, they place historical thinking in a very different mould from the one into which it was cast by those reseachers who used the Piagetian framework of cognition to investigate the development of children's historical understanding. I have argued elsewhere (Booth, 1980, 1983) that Hallam (and other pursuing similar research) has adopted an inappropriate instrument and has used faulty test instruments; their findings should be treated with caution, if not scepticism.

More Recent Research on Children's Historical Thinking

Those who then abandoned the Piagetian framework as a model for their research and started with the nature of history and the kinds of thinking it engenders, have produced far more optimistic results. My own research (Booth, 1979) was a longitudinal study of the development of the cognitive skills, concepts and attitudes of 53 pupils aged 14 to 16 of a wide range of ability studying a modern world history syllabus. A control group of pupils, matched for intelligence, who were not studying history was used to make comparisons. Over a seventeen-month period the history group made marked and significant gains in its scores on the skills, concepts and attitudes towards problems in history tests both in comparison with the scores established on the first testing and with the scores of the control group. I showed through careful analysis of the test data that such

improvements seemed to be due more to an attractive syllabus and lively, imaginative teaching methods than to maturation. A favourable attitude towards history, shown at the beginning of the course, remained steady.

I argued however that the skills, concepts and attitudes which I tested at the beginning and towards the end of the course are not peculiar to history; and a major part of the investigation looked at the history pupils' ability to think 'historically', a holistic approach to historical cognition which I defined in terms of the process by which meaning or potential meaning is abstracted from discrete sources of evidence and then drawn to a common centre. Discrete pieces of historical pictorial and written evidence chosen from the context of the course they were following were used to test orally the pupils' capacity for thinking in this adductive, inferential and creative way. The pupils were presented with the materials and asked to group them into as many or as few sets as they wanted and to give an explanation for the grouping.

Pupils approached the task in one or two ways. The first was to look for obvious, and common features - for example, people of the same race being shown in a set of four pictures, or the word 'independence' appearing in two quotations. The other form of grouping was where the pupil gave evidence of thinking that was more adventurous, creative and accurately imaginative - the hallmarks of adductive historical thought. Pupils who formed sets in this category certainly were able to comprehend and analyse the material and then to group the evidence into sets. But the essence of this grouping was that it was not based on the immediately observable features but on inferred qualities or ideas. The picture or quotation was seen not from the outside, so to speak, but from the inside; its potential or immanent meaning was perceived. The reasons for the grouping were given in explanatory terms.

71 per cent of the pupils were able to adduce one or more paradigms of this nature from the pictures. They found it more difficult to operate in this way with the quotations. Even so, 58 per cent were able to form sets of two or more pieces of source material. Further analysis showed the complexity of their thinking. It was dependent clearly on accurate,

relevant knowledge. It was generated by analytical ability and shaped by appropriate conceptual understanding. Attitudes and interests were also of importance. The teacher's emphasis on open-ended discussion in the classroom had contributed to this ability to think adductively; her perception of her pupils had more connection with their adductive thinking than the influence of the home. Intelligence (as measured by the AH4 test of general intelligence) was of less importance. Though the research showed that the majority of pupils were capable of thinking in this manner, there was clearly a wide variation in the ease with which it was achieved. One or two pupils had the ability to structure imaginatively all twelve pieces of evidence, some only two; it depended on the extent to which those factors which made up the complex of this thinking had been developed and brought into play.

My research therefore took as its starting point the nature of history and the teaching methods and syllabus which sought to turn this into the hard currency of classroom practice. I attempted to probe the extent to which pupils were able to operate and think historically; and my conclusion was quite simply that provided you look for the diversity of historical thinking and are not constrained by notions of clinical, calculating deductive thinking, and given an emphasis on pupil enquiry, discussion and the use of a wide range of source materials, it is remarkable how far pupils aged 14 - 16 of a wide range of ability are able to think imaginatively and inferentially.

Shemilt's thorough evaluation of a national curriculum development project - the Schools Council History 13 - 16 Project (briefly discussed above)- is also remarkably optimistic about children's capacity for engaging in real historical though (Shemilt, 1980). The Project's stress on the nature of history, on the use of a wide range of source materials and on active pupil involvement is shown by Shemilt to have had a profound impact on adolescent's historical conceptualization. Comparing the performance of approximately 500 Project pupils with the performance of approximately 500 pupils who were not studying the SCHP course, Shemilt found that the Project children consistently outperformed the control children in their understanding of key concepts to do with development in history. . 'The

conceptual superiority of the *History 13 - 16* candidates is significant, consistent and uniform' (ibid. p 12). He goes on to say;

> 'The main observable differences between the two groups of adolescents, those undertaking *History 13 - 16* and those following established courses, are that experimental pupils seem more accustomed to giving and seeking explanations, see more problems and puzzles in History, proliferate ideas more readily, frequently - if implicity - arrange these ideas into the germ of what deserves to be called a 'theory of History', and are generally more bold and vigorous in their thinking' (ibid. pp 13 - 14).

Lee, Dickinson and Ashby have also done some important work which shows the capacity of pupils, particularly the less able, to come to terms with the strangeness of the past (Dickinson and Lee, 1984). Arguing that 'for many teaching purposes cognitive stages are .... likely to be at best misleading and unhelpful, and at worst, rigid and stultifying, leading to a kind of 'stage prejudice'' (ibid., p. 118), the researchers began to work with small groups of children, recording their discussions on video tape. In the first published report of these research projects, the pupils were given a piece of source material either on Anglo-Saxon oath helping and the ordeal or on Spartan education. With the first, the pupils were presented with the question: 'Why do you think the Anglo-- Saxons used oath-helping and the ordeal?'; for the second 'Why do you think the Spartans treated their children the way they did?' Other questions were added, as appropriate. Where the researchers felt it might be helpful, they left the room.

In a separately reported, but similar piece of research (Ashby and Lee, 1987), a group of three pupils aged twelve-plus and characterised as 'low-ability' (all three were receiving help from the Special Needs department for reading and writing) were presented with quite a long and complex document - a description of the reign of William the Conqueror from the Anglo Saxon chronicle; the pupils were asked to discuss the document among themselves, without teacher intervention, and question its use as a source of evidence for the reign of William.

At face-value, the document was quite unsuitable for children with reading difficulties, yet left to themselves the three pupils and the others in these related research projects, reacted and interacted in ways which showed that they had the capacity to come to grips with difficult concepts. The transcripts of their discussions reveal thought processes which are complex and at times muddled but which ultimately do begin to address central conceptual ideas. The conclusion which Dickinson and Lee make is worth quoting in full.

> 'Children can and do think effectively in history. Frequently it is not the quality of pupils' thinking which sets the limit on worthwhile school history, but a failure on the part of some teachers to recognise the complexity of what they are attempting. Moreover the way to cope with this complexity is not to teach ever more simplified and simple-minded 'facts' in an endless round of description and regurgitation, with pupils classified as 'less able' compelled to spend their lessons filling in the blanks in anodyne and mindless sentences. We need sufficient flexibility of method to allow pupils room to show us what they find problematic, and enough imagination to offer work that utilizes those problems and gives pupils some chance of making progress to understanding. Underestimation of children leads only to pessimism and history as child-minding. Recognition of what children can do licenses realistic optimism, provided only that we start thinking more carefully about what is actually involved in the tasks we ask pupils to cope with in learning and understanding history' (ibid, p. 151).

Experience of History Teachers in the Classroom

The work of other practitioners reinforces these ideas and helps us to realise the potential of children to explore complex and abstract ideas in history. Particularly influential has been the classroom work of John Fines; and his exciting and sensitive use of drama and role play in history teaching has certainly been an inspiration to many and shown us the ways in which children, both of primary and secondary age, can be helped to construe the past (Fines and Verrier, 1974)

My continuing work with pupils in the classroom has led me, too, to see the value of this approach, both as a powerful incentive and as a means of generating historical discourse and understanding amongst pupils. The example which follows, typical of the approach I use, hardly constitutes proof, in the accepted sense of the word; but the ethnographic description can give a real feel of the classroom and an insight into the materials and methods which can motivate pupils.

The class of fourteen to fifteen-year-olds were studying the aftermath of the First World War in Europe. They had examined the Versailles treaties, the setting up of the League of Nations and the political crises which developed after 1919. The Locarno Pacts of 1925 became the focus of the role play lesson. The aim was to help the pupils to understand that the Locarno Treaties helped both to undermine the standing of the League of Nations still further and to reestablish Germany as a European nation without any commitment to respect the Eastern post-war borders. The lesson started in a fairly conventional manner. With the aid of a map of Europe in 1919, we reminded ourselves of the situation between 1918 and 1925. The 'war to end wars' was followed by a series of vicious little encounters, only some of which the League was able to solve. In 1925, politicians from seven European countries, including Germany, Poland and Czechosovakia, met in Switzerland by the beautiful lake Locarno to see if they could find ways of making the peace more permenant.

The pupils were then divided into seven delegations. Each delegation was given a briefing sheet which set the context and laid down the aims the delegation would hope to achieve during the negotiations. For example, the German briefing sheet reminded the delegation of their republican government, their humiliation at Versailles and their economic difficulties. The aims they were given were: the recognition of Germany by the other states of Europe and, especially, admittance to the League of Nations; stability for Germany to allow economic recovery; a pledge that the Ruhr would never again be invaded; the creation of a settlement which did not close the possibility of recovery of territory in the East. The Polish delegation's sheet touched on the chequered past history of their country - a prey to Eastern and Western powers; it reminded them that the

post 1919 Poland had been created at the expense of Germany and Russia. Danzig however is still not under Polish control and there is a dispute with Czechoslovakia over Teschen. The aims the Poles were given were: to recover all of Teschen; to secure firm alliances to protect Poland against Russia, Czechoslovakia and Germny.

I then set the scene dramatically, painting a verbal picture of the magnificent setting for the conference but pointing out that the Polish delegation had some complaints about the *pate de foie gras* which was served last night and that the white wine, a Chablis 1906, had not been properly chilled (poetic licence - but it helped to create the right atmosphere!). The first task of the delegates was to prepare a brief statement for the press as to why they were not using the machinery of the League of Nations to advance the cause of peace in Europe. The delegations were given ten minutes for this - and then with great dignity and assurance a spokesperson from each country presented their case. The second task concerned the actual negotiations between delegations on the basis of the aims each group had been given. The delegates were given a few minutes to decide their strategy, before the negotiations began. Because of the size of the class (over thirty pupils) and the smallness of the room, strict rules governed the physical movement of the negotiators. During this part of the role play the atmosphere was particularly animated. Delegates rushed from table to table, notes were passed, delegates returned to their groups for more instructions. And the seriousness with which this was taken, emerged during the formal report back when each delegation revealed what it had been able to agree with the rest of the conference. The points were written on the chalk-board; what emerged was a series of agreements remarkably similar to the actual treaties which were made - firm undertakings as far as western borders were concerned, but Germany keeping remarkably quiet about Poland and Czechoslovakia. The conference then looked at a sheet which summarised the actual agreements which were reached at Locarno; each country then had to prepare a press statement which named one strength and one weakness of the Locarno treaties from their point of view.

The success of the lesson can be judged partly from the lively, intelligent and involved response of the pupils, partly from the highly favourable written comments they made afterwards. The three comments below are typical of the response.

> 'These type of lessons are much more enjoyable and because I enjoyed it [I] didn't get board [sic] like in a normal lesson. When we learn facts like this its much easier to remember the lesson in which you learnt facts. Lessons like this get more responce [sic] because everybody is involved'.

> 'I think that Monday's lesson was rather smart. A simulation/role play lesson is really good for learning facts. Because you have to take on a character you feel as if you know every detail and you are more likely to remember dates etc. from a lesson like that than putting pen to paper'.

> 'I think that this type of lesson is a very good way of learning because it helps you actually realise what/how things actually happened. If we were just given notes it would be hard to remember them but if we all re-enact it then sometimes funny things happen (jokes) and helps remember [sic]'.

For these pupils the crux of the matter was their involvement in a problematic situation where they had to argue their case and if possible score diplomatic points and gain concessions. The fact that the 'role-play' agreements were so similar to the actual agreements is testimony to the quality of their thinking and the extent to which the pupils had immersed themselves in the context and roles they had assumed.

Conclusion

No Piagetian model of the nature and development of thinking, no National Curriculum graph with its concern for age-stage related criteria and its postulation of linear progress, can possibly encapsulate the rich and complex world of children's historical thinking such as is described above.

We need to be released from the limiting rigidity of such frameworks and embrace the possibilities for developing real historical understanding in pupils. This of course is not to say that a seven-year-old can necessarily be brought to think in history in the same way as a seventeen-year-old; language, knowledge and experience alone may well be limiting factors for the former. Nor is it to reject the History National Curriculum *tout court*. The attainment targets and their associated statements of attainment have some useful things to say about the *dimensions* of historical thinking and the ways in which different teaching strategies can be adopted to stimulate its development. But as a developmental framework against which pupils' progress can be assessed it is positively harmful. Its simplistic notion of development totally ignores the varied contexts in which thinking in history must take place. Its intention of reporting in terms of levels and attainment means will tell us nothing about individual achievement in specific contexts. Pupils in one context can show great insight, profound understanding; in another, extraordinary obtuseness. What matters are the nature of the topic, the teaching approach and materials used, the understanding and knowledge the pupils can bring to bear on the task, the charisma and skill of the teacher. It is on these that we should be reporting if we want to explore the world of children's historical thinking and raise our expectations of history teaching and learning. To be tied to the History National Curriculum, now in force in England and Wales, may at the end of the day lower our expectations and force us to ignore what recent research and the experience of gifted practitioners have shown.

NOTE

[1] A separate Working Group was established to draw up proposals for Wales. They worked closely with the Working Group for England and within the same centrally imposed framework; and the final Statutory Order for Wales is very similar in structure and design to the Order for England. The emphasis of the Programmes of Study for Wales is on Welsh history (DES, 1991b).

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